



MOUNTAIN TRIP

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Expectation Management on Denali

This information is extremely important for anyone considering climbing Denali with Mountain Trip or any guide service.

Partnership

When you engage a guide service to help you have a great experience on a mountain like Denali, you are entering into a partnership with that company and its staff.

Climbing Denali requires everyone associated with the expedition to commit to significant preparation before the climb. It also requires a high level of cooperation amongst team members during the climb. Every participant has a job to do, at each step of the journey (literally!). If each participant does his or her job in a satisfactory manner, then the entire team will have a good experience, regardless of whether or not the team has an opportunity to stand on the summit.

The Role of the Mountain Trip Office

At Mountain Trip, we are tasked with providing the logistics, support and experienced staff to help each of our climbers have a great experience on Denali. We achieve those goals through a combination of our 40 years of institutional knowledge, a commitment to supporting our staff through good wages, educational and equipment assistance, and a never-ending process of reflection and self-evaluation.

Some of the first steps we take as a company to set our teams up for having great experiences, are to help manage everyone's expectations of what climbing Denali is like and to help ensure that a climb of Denali is an appropriate choice for each of our climbers. To that end we strive to:

- Provide helpful and realistic information on our website and in our marketing.
- Try not to "sugar coat" Denali, because it is important that every prospective climber understand that the mountain can have many moods, including some that are unforgiving.
- Provide a realistic expectation of what workload is required to have a successful ascent of the peak.
- Explain what skills are required to climb the mountain, and which of those skills are ones that we can generally teach on the expedition.
- Engage each participant (climbers and guides) in a high level of clear, open and honest communication.
- Provide our guides with tools (education, training, equipment, etc) to perform at the highest levels of the industry, including helping them have a clear understanding of both Mountain Trip and National Park Service protocols and requirements.

The Role of our Guides

Our guides are tasked with numerous responsibilities, including:

- Facilitating good communication amongst your team.
- Possessing and maintaining requisite mountaineering skills.
- Maintaining current medical certifications.
- Preparing the food and equipment for your climb.
- Making objective hazard assessments and strategic decision-making.
- Observing and evaluating team members throughout the expedition.
- Treating each climber in a respectful and supportive manner.

The Role of our Climbers

Our climbers are similarly tasked with responsibilities, including:

- Being willing to participate in open, honest communication from the initial contact with our office.
- Fulfilling the requisite paperwork and financial obligations necessary to join an expedition in a timely manner.
- Assembling the appropriate clothing and equipment for the expedition.
- Arriving in Anchorage in sufficiently good physical condition to fully participate in the expedition.
- Dedicating the time to develop a base of skills sufficient for participating in the expedition.
- Conducting themselves respectfully with all other team members and with other climbers.
- Communicating with guides and team members while on the expedition.

When is it time to say, "No?"

Each year, we advise prospective climbers that Denali might not be a good choice for them at the time after discussing their previous experience and/or level of fitness. We do this because we want each climber who joins us to have a great experience, and it does not serve anyone to bring a climber on an expedition for which he or she is not sufficiently prepared.

Unfortunately, despite our best efforts to help our climbers choose appropriate trips, we occasionally find climbers who arrive on the Kahiltna Glacier lacking some degree of preparation. We have opportunities to teach skills at the lower camps on the mountain and we conduct a variety of skill reviews and help climbers brush up before heading higher on the mountain, because as we get higher on Denali, everything becomes harder and more serious. The vast majority of the time, we can help them or support them sufficiently so that they end up having a great experience in a manner that does not negatively impact other climbers on the team.

Looking back over the past decade of trip reports and feedback from guides and clients, we see that perhaps 2% of the time, we find that we have someone on a team who cannot, for one reason or another, participate sufficiently to safely climb the mountain. Please note that we use the word "safely" very carefully, because ultimately, climbing a big, cold mountain like Denali is not inherently "safe." As guides, and the administrators of a guide service, we do our best to mitigate risk, but if a team member does not demonstrate sufficient skills, fitness or ability to climb higher, he or she might create an unacceptable risk to the guides and to the team.

Therefore, we have decided to attempt to be completely clear and transparent about our expectations of our climbers. In the rare instance that a climber is just simply unprepared for the rigors and risks of the upper mountain, we want everyone to have some clear

benchmarks to refer to in our decision making about whether or not to let that climber continue up the mountain.

Basic Benchmarks for Continuing Your Ascent

Before moving to the 14,200' Advanced Base Camp on Denali, each team member must demonstrate the following:

- The physical conditioning necessary to move appropriately up the mountain
- The ability to perform basic personal maintenance (clothing selection, application of sunscreen/lip balm, hydration, eating, hygiene), with guide input and guidance
- A familiarity with the appropriate use and function of your clothing and equipment, also with guide assistance
- Demonstrate familiarity with basic mountaineering techniques such as the rest step, basic crampon, ice axe technique, and roped travel techniques
- Exhibit a willingness and ability to be a team member, meaning that each climber must help establish camps, and carry a fair share of the group loads
- The ability to move between camps at a reasonable pace. This is, of course, highly subjective, but 40 years of institutional knowledge has shown us that there are some average times that it takes to move between camps. For example:
 - From Base Camp to the 7,800' Camp, when making a "single carry," in good conditions, it should take about 4 hours.
 - From the 7,800' Camp to the 11,200' Camp, it should take about 6 hours.
 - The carry up to 13,700 and back to 11,200' should take between 5-6 hours round trip.

Before moving up to high camp at 17,200', each climber must demonstrate everything listed above, plus:

- The ability to efficiently use an ascender and negotiate the fixed lines when you carry loads up to the ridge above 16,200'
- The capacity to maintain an average time (in good conditions) of carrying up the fixed lines to our cache site at 16,400' and returning to the 14,200' camp is between 6-8 hours round trip

Before attempting the summit, climbers must demonstrate everything listed above, plus:

- The ability to pass running belays with thick gloves and mittens
- The physical conditioning necessary to help carry group summit day equipment
- The physical capacity to maintain an average pace of 6-7 hours en route to High Camp

The intent of this information is not to stress anyone out, but rather to help every team member have a clear understanding of what it takes to successfully climb to the top of North America. The information above is intended to give each participant the tools necessary to assess how you are doing, relative to where you are on the mountain.

We encourage any prospective Denali climber to contact us with any and all questions and to do your best to prepare yourself for your adventure.